EMOTIONAL/SPIRITUAL SUPPORT TO THOSE SUFFERING LOSS

Dr.Tommy W. Smith

Chaplain, D.C.C., M.Div., M.A.

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

Objectives

- To identify and understand the phases of grief
- To recognize one's own personal meaning of loss
- To develop strategies for providing emotional and spiritual support to grieving families
- To develop ways of coping with job stress and experience of secondary grief

THE CONTEXT

- L & D
- Miscarriage
- Still Birth
- When a baby dies
- Nurses caring for the mother and baby, and experiencing grief and stress

Grief Theory

- Grief is experienced in relation to the significance of attachment
- Grief is affected by cognitive, social, and emotional development
- Grief is affected by cultural/ethnic heritage, and religious beliefs

Caring individuals can assist the bereaved by guiding them through what to expect, choices available, giving information, and providing emotional and spiritual support

- Knowledge of the phases of grief is important in identifying emotions and responses to loss
- Understanding how and when these phases occur, there is increased sensitivity to the mother's needs, and the father's needs, in addition to one's own needs

The Phases of Grief

Outlined by Glen Davidson, Understanding Mourning

- Shock and Numbness
- Searching and Yearning
- Disorientation
- Reorganization

Shock and Numbness

- **Duration:** Characteristics most intense first 2 weeks
- **Characteristics:**
  Attention span-short,
  Concentration is difficult,
  Decision-making is impaired
  Stunned, disbelief, Resistant to stimuli, Functioning impeded
  Denial and Time confusion
  Failure to accept reality

Searching and Yearning

- **Duration:** Characteristics dominant 2nd week to 4th Month
- **Characteristics:** Sensitive to stimuli, Anger/guilt, dreams, restless/impatient, double meaning, testing what is real, irritability, weight gain/loss, sleeping difficulties, aching arms, obsession to get pregnant again, preoccupation with the deceased, resentment, bitterness, time confusion, palpitations, sighing, lack of strength, headaches, Perceptual confirmation (is key)

Disorientation

- **Duration:** Characteristics dominant 5th to 9th month
- **Characteristics:** Think “I’m going crazy.” Social withdrawal, Disorganized, Forgetful, Awareness of Reality, Depressed, Guilt, Insomnia, Anorexia, Weight gain/loss, Sense of failure, Sadness, Exhaustion, Difficulty in concentration, Feels ill “Sick role,” Lack of energy

Reorganization/resolution

- **Duration:** Characteristics dominant 18th - 24th month
- **Characteristics:** Sense of release, renewed energy, able to make decisions easier, Eating and sleeping habits re-established, Able to laugh and smile again, Increased awareness in self-esteem (appearance, diet, rest, exercise); Begin planning for the future

Questions Commonly Asked After the Death of Infant

- Why did this happen? (God, Why…)
- How can I help someone who is grieving?
- Am I losing my mind?
- Do men and women grieve differently?
- What will happen to the surviving children?
- Should we have another child?
- How long will the pain last?
- Should I reach out for help?
- What have I learned from all this?

The Best We Can Do is Offer Non-judgemental, Compassionate Support

- We do not need to provide solutions
- We do not need to save them
- We cannot presume to know what they need
- We do not need to pity them
- We can have empathy
- We can offer emotional and spiritual support

Critical Needs In Caring for Yourself

- Take responsibility for your own replenishing (be assertive rather than passive or aggressive)
- Know your limitations (professional and personal)

  "Don't give blood when you are anemic and never give all of your blood."
- Actively grieve your own losses
- Learn to receive as well as give
- Offer support to each other as caregivers
- Learn to take time for yourself (to laugh, to enjoy hobbies)
- Seek guidance from others (minister, Chaplain, counselor, friend)

Handling Stress

Steps to Relieve Stress

- Self-care
- Avoid abusive substances
- Be flexible
- Realistic goals
- The power of Praise
- Sense of humor
- Avoid sulking
- Communication
- Spiritual connection
- Ask for help

Handling Stress

Things to Watch for

- Loneliness
- “Blue Mondays”
- Are you . . .
  - Letting things go? Constantly watching TV?
  - Yelling at the kids? Withdrawing for others?
  - Sleeping in late? Dropping out of groups?
  - Gaining weight? Drinking more than usual?

Handling Stress

If you answered yes to any of these questions …

- You may be depressed. Be proactive!
  - Talk to a friend.
  - Reach out to coworkers.
  - Ask for help.